

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	18 June 2026
TITLE	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Education
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	In order to ensure effective performance management
AUTHOR	Cllr Dewi Jones – Cabinet Member for Education
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT	Gwern ap Rhisiart – Head of Education

1. Why it needs scrutiny

To ensure that Committee Members undertake scrutiny of performance matters within the Department.

2. Background/Context

2.1 Background/Introduction

The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the field for which I am responsible as Cabinet Member for Education. This includes outlining the latest with regard to the pledges in the Council Plan and the Department's performance measures.

We are implementing the Council Plan 2023-28, and I herein report on the progress up to the end of March 2026, recognising that it is still early days in the context of some of the pledges that are new in the document since April 2024. Nevertheless, all matters have been the subject of discussion and have been challenged by myself at a performance challenge meeting, and I am satisfied with the performance of the Department.

2.2 Rationale and justification

2.2.1 Performance of Pledges in the Council Plan Projects

I am very satisfied with the work carried out during the period in question, and **Appendix 1** provides updates on all of the Education Department's Council Plan projects. I would like to draw your attention to the following projects:

2.2.2 Modernising buildings and the learning environment

The work on the 'Modernising buildings and the learning environment' Project has continued to make progress across a number of sites over the last period.

At Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes, construction is progressing and it is expected that the project will be completed during the summer term with the school opening at the beginning of the autumn term 2026, providing modern facilities that will support improved learning experiences for pupils and the whole school community.

In the Ysgol Tryfan project, further plans for the school were developed during the summer of 2025, highlighting the need to increase the original budget. The Cabinet has subsequently approved an increase in the project's budget from £18 million to £23.6 million. The design team continues to develop a plan that meets net zero building requirements, with work underway to prepare for the submission of the Outline Business Case during the summer term 2026.

2.2.3 Transforming education for children in their early years

The work of the 'Transforming education for children in their early years' Project has continued to make positive progress over the past year. As part of the work to support the development of children's independence, toileting information packs have been distributed to childcare providers across Gwynedd as well as to parents. In addition, an episode of the podcast '*Mam, Dad a Magu*' was created, focusing on children's toileting, in order to provide accessible information and support to families and professionals.

The Childcare for Two-year-olds Scheme is having a positive impact on families by giving access to 12.5 hours of free childcare, helping to reduce the cost-of-living pressure. The Scheme has also continued to expand across the county. In the last year, the scheme has been extended to Tywyn, Harlech, Llandderfel and Llanuwchllyn, Penrhyndeudraeth, Efailnewydd/Buan, Botwnnog/Tudweiliog, Cricieth, Caernarfon, Llanberis and Porthmadog West.

2.2.4 Promoting the well-being of children and young people and reducing the cost of sending children to school

During 2025/26, work has continued to promote the well-being of children and young people and reduce the financial pressure on families when sending children to school. Following the comprehensive consultation in 2024 and the valuable feedback received from parents, learners, staff and headteachers, the findings have continued to inform the work of schools and the local authority.

During the year, schools have used the results of the Cost Friendly School Audit to implement practical steps to reduce costs for families. Examples of this include reviewing school uniform policies, promoting second-hand schemes, considering the cost of school trips and additional activities, and ensuring that information about financial support is clearly available to parents and carers.

The working group has developed a Cost Friendly School Charter and schools have started working towards achieving the relevant measures in order to be recognised as 'Cost Friendly' schools. This work has encouraged schools to share good practice and to give greater consideration to the impact of school costs on learner well-being and participation.

We rely on the co-operation of schools to drive this agenda forward as many of the decisions that affect this are made by individual schools. In light of this, members who are also school governors have a key role to play in influencing and scrutinising the decisions of individual schools.

The project is now fully implemented, and supporting schools to put the principles of the Cost Friendly School Charter into action, share successful practices across the county, and ensure that the voice of families and learners continues to inform provision will be part of the Department's day-to-day work rather than continuing as a specific project within the Council Plan.

3. The Department's Performance

The Department's Services are performing well, and I confirm that I am satisfied with their current performance. The following information does not refer to all Services in the Department, please see below some of the highlights. For full details of performance against the Department's measures, please refer to **Appendix 2**.

Catering

The Free School Meals provision for all primary learners in Gwynedd has continued to be a success during 2025/26, with the service continuing to support the well-being of children and young people across the county. Schools and the Catering service have continued to work closely together to ensure a consistent provision of nutritious and appealing meals for learners.

Take-up levels for the offer have remained strong during the year, and the Department has continued to promote the benefits of school meals among families in order to encourage more children to take advantage of the provision. In March 2026, an average of 6,160 free school meals were provided on any given day.

As well as providing nutritious meals, the service has continued to support the Council's wider priorities by promoting local food, reducing food waste and raising awareness among learners of the importance of healthy eating.

The Sustainable Schools Challenge

Good progress has continued with the Sustainable Schools Challenge project during 2025/26 with the preparation of the site of the old school in Bontnewydd taking place during the year.

Collaboration between Ysgol Bontnewydd, the community, and project partners has remained strong, with the aim of developing an eco-friendly school and community facilities

that reflect the Welsh Government's carbon ambitions. The project continues to promote the principles of the circular economy by making the best use of reused materials and sustainable construction methods.

The temporary school has continued to operate successfully, ensuring a suitable learning environment for the pupils while planning and preparation work is underway.

The project continues to develop positively, with the vision of creating a modern, sustainable and innovative building that meets the needs of the local community for years to come.

School Support Service

The School Support Service has continued to develop during 2025/26, with a focus on strengthening the strategic and operational support provided to Gwynedd schools. The service has established arrangements that enable schools to have more cohesive access to support and guidance, ensuring that the needs of schools, headteachers and governors are met in a more effective and timely manner.

During the year, there has been an emphasis on developing a closer relationship between the service and individual schools to ensure that the support provided reflects local needs and school improvement priorities. The service has supported schools in key areas such as leadership, curriculum planning, and workforce planning.

Since the service was established, officers have been able to visit all schools across the Authority, contributing to the development of an open and positive relationship of working in partnership with schools.

Over the past two years, there has been a significant reduction in applications for headteacher positions, with the challenge of attracting individuals to school leadership positions increasing. In response to this, the Education Department has developed a *Future Leaders* programme to provide practical support and ensure a developmental pathway and succession within the education system. The programme is being run for the second time this year for two cohorts, with 17 participants from the primary sector and seven from the secondary sector taking part.

Since January 2026, a new programme has also been set up to provide bespoke support for new headteachers and interim acting headteachers. The programme includes mentor support and networking opportunities to support school leaders during the early stages of their leadership. Currently, 22 headteachers have committed to the programme, and the feedback so far has been very positive.

The School Support Service also provides support and advice to School Governing Bodies throughout the county. To strengthen this provision and respond to the growing demand, additional capacity has recently been added to the team through the appointment of an additional Governor Support Officer. This will enable the service to continue to provide timely and effective support to governors in carrying out their statutory responsibilities.

Attendance

Attendance has remained a priority during 2025/26, with attendance levels showing gradual improvement across the county's schools. Although attendance levels have not yet fully returned to the pre-pandemic situation, the overall trend remains positive and reflects the impact of the work of the Authority and the schools.

Up to April 2026, the Authority's average attendance was 91.0%, which equates to the Wales rate for the same period. Gwynedd's historical data shows a steady increase over a three-year period, with attendance increasing from 89.7% in 2022/23, to 90.4% in 2023/24, and then to 90.9% in 2024/25.

This progress has been supported by a continuing focus on early intervention, monitoring of attendance patterns, and close collaboration between schools, the Authority's services and families. Direct support through Education Welfare Officers has remained a key element of the work, helping to reduce barriers to school attendance and supporting learners to re-engage with their education.

Exclusions

The work of the Inclusion Service, together with the further development of the *Camu i'r Copa* Unit in Felinwnda, has enabled schools to access more timely, flexible and bespoke support for learners who are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education. As a result, schools have been able to implement earlier and more effective interventions before situations escalate to the point where a permanent exclusion is being considered.

The implementation of the new Inclusion Strategy has strengthened a more consistent approach across schools, with a clear focus on early intervention, promoting emotional well-being and positive relationships, as well as developing inclusive practices and restorative approaches to support learners more effectively within their mainstream schools.

In addition, the outreach provision has continued to evolve, providing flexible support tailored to the needs of schools and individual learners. While challenges remain in some complex cases, the collaboration between schools, the Inclusion Service and the support teams has further strengthened.

Pupil Referral Unit - Camu i'r Copa

We are pleased to report that *Camu i'r Copa*, the Pupil Referral Unit which is located on the site of the former Ysgol Felinwnda in Llanwnda, has completed two full terms of operation as a successful registered provision. Since the opening of the centre, the provision has developed into a valuable resource for the young people of the county, providing educational, emotional and social support in a safe, nurturing and responsive environment.

During the 2025/26 academic year, the Centre has supported a number of learners with diverse needs, with a clear focus on building confidence, resilience and positive engagement with education. Through small classes, personal learning plans and appropriate therapeutic support, many of the pupils have shown positive progress in their well-being, behaviour and attendance.

The dedicated team at *Camu i'r Copa* has worked closely with families, schools and partner services to ensure that each individual receives the support most suited to their needs. The curriculum has continued to develop by offering a combination of academic subjects, practical activities and opportunities to develop life skills, with a strong emphasis on well-being and personal development. Positive feedback from pupils, parents and partners has reflected the positive impact the provision is having on local young people.

The Centre's location in Llanwnda has continued to be a key element of its success, ensuring that young people can access specialist support within their own community. This reflects Cyngor Gwynedd's ongoing commitment to providing inclusive, accessible and high-quality education for all learners.

Safeguarding and Well-being

During 2025/26, the Safeguarding and Well-being Team focused on establishing and strengthening the new Safeguarding and Well-being Service within Gwynedd schools. The service has been fully established, with contact and enquiry recording systems now in place and in regular use by schools across the county.

New arrangements for responding to allegations against school staff have been developed and implemented, as well as a review of training arrangements to align with the latest Social Care Wales standards.

Safeguarding quality and monitoring visit arrangements are now established, with reporting and evaluation processes in place. Further work is planned for 2026/27 to evaluate and share good practice. Our annual quality monitoring and evaluation visit arrangements are now robust and compare very favourably with other Local Authorities.

The service continued to provide training and guidance to schools throughout the year, supporting an effective response to learners' safeguarding and well-being needs.

The use of Children Looked After (CLA) attendance data and monitoring has strengthened, with an Attendance Dashboard and supporting systems enabling more effective monitoring at school, catchment and sector level. An annual process for monitoring the Personal Education Plans of Children Looked After has also been established, with training and support being provided to schools.

There were staffing challenges in ensuring timely safeguarding quality visits, but this was mitigated by increasing the capacity of the service from three to four members of staff, thereby improving the team's ability to respond to demand and maintain consistent support.

Youth Service

During 2025/26, the Youth Service has continued to expand and strengthen its community provision across Gwynedd, ensuring broad and accessible opportunities for young people across the county. The service now delivers 34 community projects and clubs on a weekly basis across Arfon, Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, including fixed community clubs, mobile provision and specialist services.

During the year, five new community clubs were established in priority areas, namely Trawsfynydd, Bala, Llandwrog, Mynytho and Tywyn. This development has strengthened local access to youth activities and ensured that more young people in rural communities are able to access safe and supportive provision within their area.

Partnership work has remained a key element of the service's success. The ongoing collaboration with the Urdd has enabled 'aelwydydd' and after-school activities to be held and developed across the county, while close work with secondary schools has ensured a provision that is more co-ordinated and responsive to young people's needs.

Significant progress has also been made in the area of youth participation and engagement. Young people's forums have now been established across Gwynedd, and work has begun on developing a young people's voice forum at Council level. This will provide further opportunities for young people to contribute directly to county decisions and influence services that affect them.

In addition, the service has begun preparing for the development of the Welsh Government's new five-year Youth Work Strategy. This work will involve extensive engagement with young people, partners and Council services to ensure that the needs and priorities of young people in Gwynedd are at the heart of plans for the future. Face-to-face meetings have been held to engage with service partners in Caernarfon, Bangor, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Pwllheli and Bala.

The work of the Youth Service has continued to have a positive impact on the well-being, confidence and personal development of young people across Gwynedd. By providing safe and supportive spaces to meet, socialise and develop new skills, the service has helped to strengthen community ties and reduce feelings of loneliness and social exclusion.

4. Consultation

The report has been created based on the information and content of the latest Education Department performance challenge and support meeting, with the Chief Executive, Head of Department, Service Managers and myself attending this meeting.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Report on Council Plan projects 2025-26

Appendix 2: Education Department Performance Measures